

Coming of Age

by  
Kaylee Eyerly

A THESIS

submitted to  
Oregon State University  
Honors College

in partial fulfillment of  
the requirements for the  
degree of

Honors Baccalaureate of Science in Chemical Engineering  
(Honors Scholar)

Presented May 16, 2018  
Commencement June 2018



## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Kaylee Eyerly for the degree of Honors Baccalaureate of Science in Chemical Engineering presented on May 16, 2018. Title: Coming of Age.

Abstract approved: \_\_\_\_\_

Jennifer Richter

Coming of Age is a collection of ekphrastic poetry inspired by photographs taken throughout Oregon between 2012-2018. The collection traces the author's experience as she transitions from teenager to adult, struggles with change and loss, and studies to become a chemical engineer.

Key Words: ekphrastic poetry, prose poetry, poetry, photography, engineering, Oregon, family, relationships

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Honors Baccalaureate of Science in Chemical Engineering project of Kaylee Eyerly  
presented on May 16, 2018.

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Toni Doolen, Dean, Oregon State University Honors College

I understand that my project will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon  
State University, Honors College. My signature below authorizes release of my  
project to any reader upon request.

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Kaylee Eyerly, Author



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## **Foreword**

Every photographer knows that a hand, a camera strap, or her own shoes will eventually end up in a photo. After taking a few photos like that and being unable to remove my shoes from the image, I embraced the accidental inclusion. Since 2011, I have been taking self-portraits turned at my shoes in various positions, at different locations, and with other people. This type of photograph has become increasingly common on social media over the past few years and coined the term “shoe selfie.” From these photos, I have been inspired to write a collection of poems that focuses on my transition from teenager to adult.

Poetry written about or inspired by art is known as ekphrastic poetry, and in an unusual twist, I have written ekphrastic poetry about my own work. Though the art that sparked the ekphrasis doesn't typically accompany the poem when published, I've included my photographs here to place the reader in my position. The poems relate to the photographs in varying detail and explore themes taken from my life: living in Oregon, dealing with loss and change, growing up, and studying engineering, among others. As my time at Oregon State University has focused on Chemical Engineering and STEM extracurriculars, this project has allowed me to explore my artistic interests and write poetry from the unique perspective of an engineer.



Columbia River Gorge, OR: Multnomah Falls  
January 17, 2012  
Canon EOS 60D

## **Oregon, My Oregon (Coming Home I)**

I have longed for Oregon like a starry-eyed pioneer, though I'm from where I'm going and will be there in three days. Iowa is quickly gone, still black and white with winter. Nebraska is somehow worse than Iowa, the stock PC background of a grassy knoll backed by blue skies. Wyoming is mostly truck stops marked by large yellow Adult signs and a utopian hotel chain called Little America. Somewhere between Wyoming and Utah the jagged wall of the Rockies appears, reminding me that freeways are best built in flat, treeless wastelands. The trip is slipping by until on the side of a freeway in Idaho, I find myself deciding what to keep and what to leave after one of the spark plugs on the truck blows. We fit what we can into the other car. What's left? Towels, the vacuum, the empty luggage (its contents fit better loose), and the large planters from the deck. After a call to a tow truck, we are moving again. The remainder of my trip is spent sharing my seat with my Airedale's 70 lbs and panting breath. On my Oregon Trail, I lose things I think I need and gain what I want most.



Salem, OR: Studying at Bush Park on my 17<sup>th</sup> birthday  
October 18, 2012  
Canon EOS 60D

## Five Fingers

### I

When I was 3 my parents were cooking with a kettle grill and while the lid was sitting on the patio I decided it looked like a jungle gym. I placed my feet and hands firmly on the black metal until I felt my flesh melt. Moments later I was swooped up and soothed late into the night as my feet and palms began to blister and swell. When I look at my palms I still feel the pillowed burns.

### II

Growing up, I had warts on the backs of both hands. My mother always said she didn't want me to have warts when I went to hold hands with my boyfriend someday. After a few sessions of dry ice, they were burned off, leaving small scars. On my left middle finger there is one that looks like an arrow pointing down, or if you squint, an airplane. When I flip someone off that little arrow points down, further highlighting my point (thanks mom). Also, my boyfriend and I don't like holding hands.

### III

Middle school would break twice a year for an interim week of classes based on teachers' hobbies. I went mountain biking on Peterson Ridge, hiked at Smith Rock and Camp Sherman for photography, and made tie off blankets for the Ronald McDonald House. We were warned on day one that the clippers were sharp. Day two, I was talking and cutting when the blades clicked with a firm snip after slicing the fabric. I heard the click and realized I'd caught more than the fabric in the blades. I had filleted my palm deep enough to see my flesh has more layers than any fabric.

### VI

My small fingers had to stretch for each note. I gripped the neck too hard because my fingers weren't quite long enough for a full size. But adults play a full-size violin, so I became nimbler like someone with larger hands. But the stretching hurt my formerly-fractured wrist, so I had to quit.

### V

The grooves of my thumbprint on my left hand are disturbed by a cooking burn. The lines run in smooth equidistant parallel until near the top where the print fizzles into a blank imperfection.



Salem, OR: Cross Country dinner at my house  
September 21, 2012  
Canon EOS 60D

**Run, cooltrackstar@hotmail.com**

I hold my back up straight,  
lean forward slightly so my  
body feels pushed forward,  
but not hunched.

I keep my arms relaxed at 90°  
and hands in unclenched fists.

I shake out the tension,  
passing it from foot to foot  
until it's diluted to confidence.

Then I realign. I focus my irregular  
breathing and deeply sigh to  
quiet my high heartrate. I stare  
down at the soft red rubber  
and center my dominant right  
foot to the border of the white line.

The ringmaster tells us to ready-set.

We hover down for our start.

The blank rings through the frigid air  
and the shot propels me forward.

Boys longed for my speed back then,  
but I have limits in myself now.



Sisters, OR: Near the elk farm  
March 30, 2012  
Canon EOS 60D

## Let's Talk about Suicide in Gym

Springtime in a town small enough for just one high school,  
Freshmen lethargically walk to the red line for attendance,  
No hustle in sight.  
A gym once rambunctious feels like tepid water.  
Muffled tones become silent as Student Teacher speaks,  
“You know, this same thing happened when I was 18.

You'll *get over it.*”

Shut up,  
Uttered in unspoken unison by the grieving kids.  
Followed by an audible “how dare you.”  
Heavy words to hear.  
Tense air, distinct agitation as the five stages cycle by,  
15 and confronting the darkest self-destruction.  
Roll call starts and all are counted, the kids reluctantly rise.  
Maybe pain dissipates, and breaks heal.

Maybe you *get over it.*

Four weeks later, Student Teacher's words are glue in his mouth.  
This time it was the boy who sat behind me during the first eulogy.  
This time it was someone taking gym.  
The sharp bell sounds, leading kids to the red line for roll call.  
Names are read aloud, the line of soldiers holds tight.  
Told to support each other like Roman warriors,  
No one left behind.  
Hands clenched, mouths sealed, breaths held  
Waiting for the pause where he used to belong:  
But Coach practiced so there would be none.  
Because acknowledgement is agony.  
The class was down one—missing, missed, not erased,  
Leaving another notch on the hearts  
Of the freshmen class.  
He's still 15, but the rest didn't stay young.

He too heard the words *get over it,*

He didn't listen.

For T.H. and N.S.



Detroit, OR: Detroit Lake  
March 26, 2012  
Canon EOS 60D



Newport, OR: Crabbing on my parents' anniversary  
August 18, 2012  
Canon EOS 60D



Willamette National Forest, OR: Marion Forks Fish Hatchery  
July 6, 2012  
Canon EOS 60D

### **Meet Me Halfway**

Some hatchery fish get picked up at the end of their river route to be trucked back to the headwaters they came from.

Then they start over again.



Salem, OR: South Salem High School football game  
September 14, 2012  
Canon EOS 60D

## **New Kid**

I always spot you. Sometimes you look around, hungry for acknowledgement, sometimes you look a little sick or scared. Lunch is Lindsay Lohan hiding in the bathroom stall. Sometimes they'll assume you just transferred within the district. Sometimes they'll think you're a French exchange student and that you don't speak English. Be the cool kid who just rolled into town. Say yes to clubs, game nights, sports, and parties. Sometimes the transition is fast and others slow, but proximity brings friendship. Trust me, I've been you seven times.



Salem, OR: Hanging out downtown with Lily  
November 10, 2012  
Canon EOS 60D

## **Lily of the Valley**

My first day, red cowgirl boots sit down next to me in English.

We're the only two girls with boy haircuts.

Friendly and bold enough to say hello, she does.

Later, when I'm running up a hill near home, she appears.

We say hi and I meet who I assume is her sister.

She's actually a Chilean exchange student.

The lunch room is so big it takes me two weeks to find her,

but soon I'm invited to improv, tacos and game nights.

Before long, Lily's friends are my friends too.

At parties she makes everyone surrender their phones to a basket.

For photoshoots she's willing to be Nancy Drew or a punk rocker.

In history we match with red glasses/jeans, black t-shirts, and white sneakers.

Once, for 5 minutes, we were Thelma and Louise in a police chase.

After dances we race in heels, clopping on the pavement.

When she enters a film contest or applies for a study abroad she gets it.

Even from Germany, for every letter I send, I get at least two back.

And I'm barely surprised when I learn she's eaten dinner with Angela Merkel.

Lily, I hope this poem makes up for all the letters I haven't replied to.



Gervais, OR: Bauman's Farm  
October 12, 2012  
Canon EOS 60D



Salem, OR: Minto-Brown Island Park  
November 21, 2012  
Canon EOS 60D



Salem, OR: Minto-Brown Island Park with Rishi  
January 1, 2013  
Canon EOS 60D

**Will you go steady with me?**

Winter is cold and so am I,  
but that doesn't bother you.

Our first dates are cold.

At home our families hover,  
outside our dates are free.

Winter is getting older  
and so are we, but when  
you ask me to go steady  
next to the Willamette  
at a park in the flood plain  
I laugh for five long minutes,  
my white breath sinking your heart,  
until I find my voice  
to say yes.



Salem, OR: My old house  
February 14, 2013  
iPhone 4s

### **King of Hearts**

My senior year of high school  
people said “turn up” to mean  
party hard. It came from a crude song.  
On the way to the Valentine’s dance  
we made a quick stop at Whole Foods.  
After posing with some  
Romanesco broccoli,  
we bought some produce,  
brought it into the dance,  
and handed out turnips.



Salem, OR: Planning an urban farm for Envirothon  
February 21, 2014  
Canon EOS 60D

### **Almost a Farm Kid**

I started learning genetics when I was 8 from my grandpa.

A PhD in animal husbandry, he explained to me  
the difference between pure breed and pure blood sheep.

I learned to think of the seasons with their corresponding  
fruits and vegetables and that farmers could pick and choose  
parts of animals or crops and selectively breed them to give us  
dinner. From herding and showing sheep, visiting the dairy,  
and horseback riding through timber lands,

I grew ready to take the tag applicator from my grandpa  
and pierce the sheeps' ears, with bright plastic jewelry  
denoting their breeding in numbers and letters,  
marking them for life



Salem, OR: Rishi and me before homecoming  
October 5, 2013  
Canon EOS 60D



Salem, OR: Adieu Caribou Concert  
May 2014  
iPhone 4s



Salem, OR: South Salem High School Graduation  
June 9, 2014  
iPhone 4s

### **RIP to My Youth**

As I walk across the stage in 5-inch platforms

I do not feel any different, but I am.

School will never be free again.

The family that greets me will split in two.

The boy I take photos with after will leave.

I want to warn myself that I will not keep  
my fresh start in college for long.

But I reach the other side and gracefully  
descend the stairs. My biology teacher  
said I will do something wonderful  
and I still hope she is right.



Salem, OR: Lily's going away party  
August 2, 2014  
Canon EOS 60D



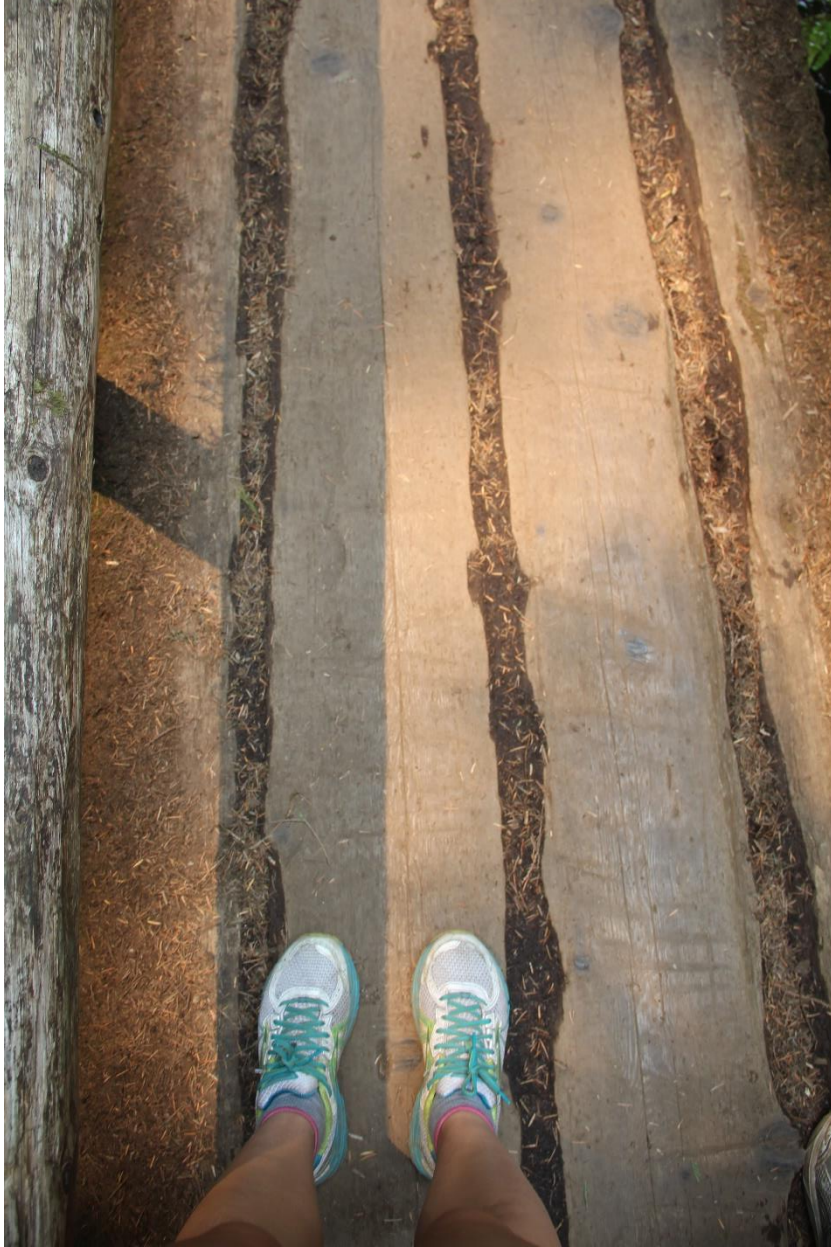
McKenzie Highway, OR: Proxy Falls  
July 16, 2017  
Canon EOS 60D



McKenzie Highway, OR: The gate  
March 27, 2014  
Canon EOS 60D

### **McKenzie Highway (HWY 242)**

Road to nowhere, road to everywhere  
Cathedrals of gold and green ponderosas decorate the sides  
The pass closes in October, snow drifts owning the road  
At night the headlights fill with insects, coyotes, and chipmunks  
Past the gates that don't reopen until mid-June  
Ragged lodgepoles take hold, the pavement winds around  
As the screen of trees thins  
Turn a corner and fields of lava flow for miles  
The Pacific Crest Trail intersects the highway where  
Wagon tracks score the porous rock and I hear them get stuck  
A castle of black lava rock appears  
Built by the CCC: Dee Wright Observatory  
Eventually the car leaves the lake of lava  
Reentering the forest with more nameless lakes than named  
Ultimately the road traced by mountains  
Finds its way back to Eugene



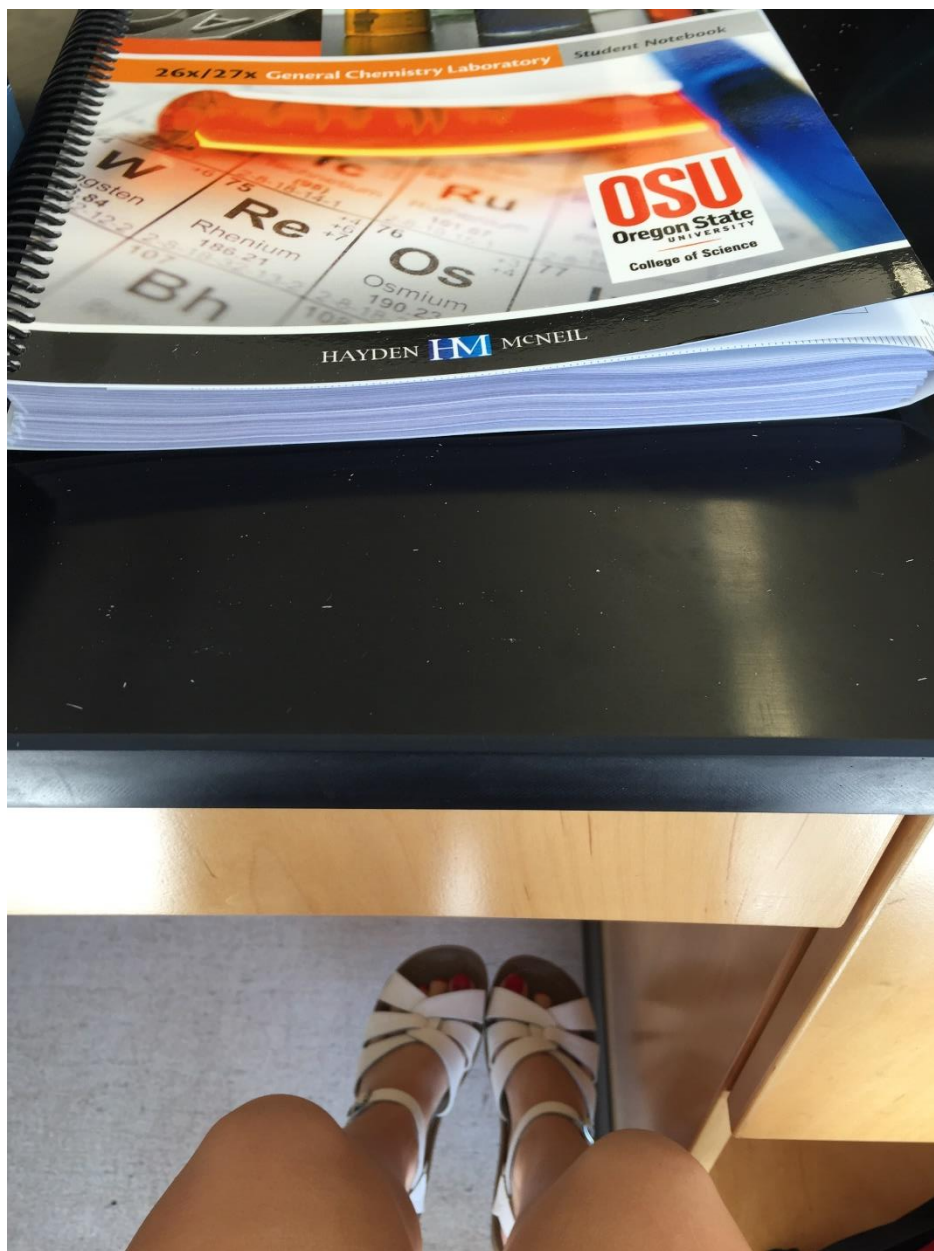
McKenzie Highway, OR: McKenzie River Trail  
August 3, 2014  
Canon EOS 60D

## **Ready, Set, Go**

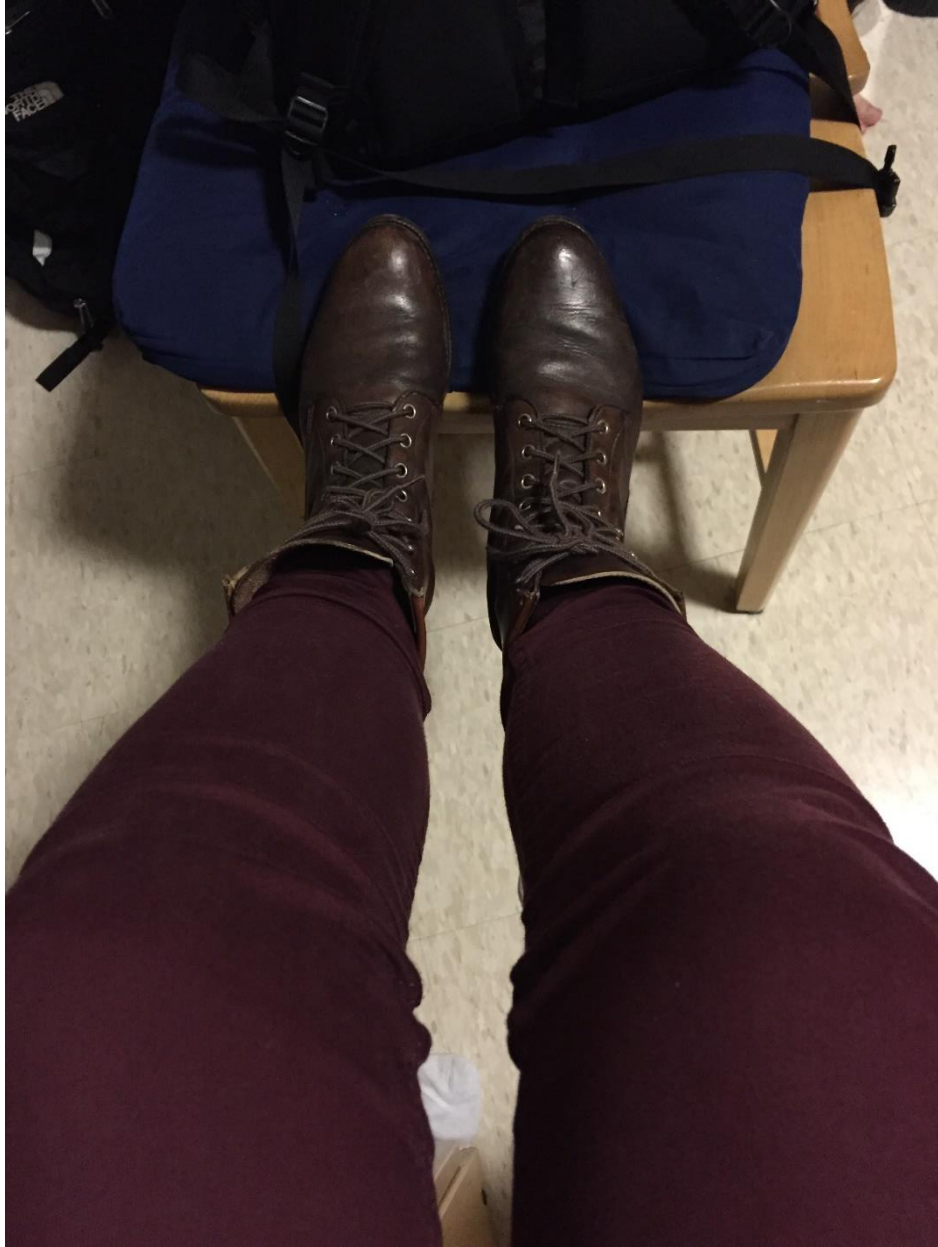
At the start the smoke plume is a roasted marshmallow floating above the trees. Smoke strains the sun through its haze, until the sun is an orange orb viewable with the naked eye. The land below is coated in golden glow, a false angelic twinge that makes the earth feign catching fire. Driving past the wildfire, heat drifts off the flames, rippling the air for yards horizontal and vertical. Sometimes the smoke smells like death, others like fresh birthday candles. The gold grey fire-sky rains down burning snowflakes of ash. As the smoke settles low it keeps the day in hostage twilight, never quite waking up. When the sun sets, the smoke is erased by dark to reveal the glow from the flames that shows where they're crawling. Deep orange dotted with blue-reds illuminates the hotspots where the fire is choking the land. Next summer I will drive to my favorite patch of forest, down a highway with snowpack so deep it's only open four months a year. I know there are black scars awaiting me. I need permanence like the forest needs fire.



Aumsville, OR: My grandparents' house  
July 2014  
iPhone 4s



Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University, rebelling in my first lab  
October 7, 2014  
iPhone 6



Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University, West Hall  
January 24, 2015  
iPhone 6

### **Karan's Room**

Let's see how many people can fit in Karan's  
room at once. Five on his bed, one at his desk,  
and Michael gets his half of the room all to himself  
while we crowd around and decide what to do.

Should we play medieval Monopoly: *Settlers of Catan*?  
Or talk more shit about who has the most homework?  
We could combine the contents of our mini fridges for dinner.  
Or we could play *Cards Against Humanity* again.

We will make each other sheet cake for our birthdays  
and hunt down some contraband candles to light  
next to the window, with the door open so  
the fire alarms don't catch on.

We will make plans, break them, live together, and then not.  
The dorms were box living, but my group made them better  
as I learned how to cook, take care of myself,  
and to never put a loaf of bread next to solid air freshener.



Corvallis, OR: My 21er  
October 21, 2016  
iPhone 6

% Talk Nerdy to Me

% The Chemical Engineer's Guide to Seduction for All Occasions

Jingle bells, jingle bells, let's mingle our cells.

Roses are red, violets are blue, superheated steam ain't got nothin on you.

I'd like to measure the convective heat coefficient between you and me.

Do you wanna know what we have in common with a particle? Deeper penetration into classically forbidden regions.

Don't like physical chemistry? I can think of another use for tunneling.

I'd like to reach steady state with you.

Baby, are you an MFR? Because you spin my stir rod.

Like lengthening a PFR to improve production, you can lengthen something else to improve reproduction.

Are you a catalyst? Because you speed up my reaction.

Hey honey, want to come back to my lab and drain my ion exchange column?

I'll show you my bioreactor and you can determine the scale factor.

You're so fine you pass through all the sieves.

I'm like a schedule at a petrochemical site, it takes no time to erect my column, and I'm always on time.

BLEVE me when I say you're all I want for Christmas.

The Second Law of Thermodynamics says you should share your hotness with me.

When you blow that extra vapor and increase the liquid flowrate, it really floods my column.

Our volatilities must be close because it'll be hard to separate us.

You must be an azeotrope because you touch my curves just right.

You're so pure I'd never go for a side stream.

Are you going home for Christmas? Because my packed bed is always open.



Lyons, OR: My grandma's old house  
March 21, 2015  
Canon EOS 60D

### **The Family Marbles**

Rebellion, mental illness, and addiction

Runaways, freeloaders, adulterers, drug dealers, and drop outs

Narcissism, depression, bipolar disorder, and schizophrenia

Alcohol, tobacco, weed, coke, meth, and heroin

It all runs in the family,

like the jug of antique marbles we grew up

admiring to be split when Grandma dies,

but it all stops with me.



Woodburn, OR: Wooden Shoe Tulip Farm  
March 27, 2015  
Canon EOS 60D

### **Tulips for Your Trouble**

The next time you think  
We are brown and blonde,  
Tall and short, brash and soft,  
Remember that I knew you  
Well enough to always find  
your drugs.

Then you started going to church  
Again because of a boy on Tinder.  
Maybe we aren't so different.  
I realized you'd changed when  
I envied  
your faith.



Mount St. Helens, WA: Elk on Coldwater Ridge  
March 24, 2015  
Canon EOS 60D

## **Loowit || Mount St. Helens**

When I went home for spring break freshman year I thought I was going camping at Mount St. Helens with friends. Before my trip, I found a diary stamped with red wrists by a family member. When my father treated the incident with cavalier indifference, I knew I couldn't trust him anymore. I went camping and saw the mountain for just 15 minutes through the rain and snow, but it was enough. I saw logging trucks snarled by the eruption, left as monuments. Trees fallen in spirals of toothpicks from the blast wind as it whipped around the valley. I saw a beaver and the Mount St. Helens elk herd. We even hiked into a snowstorm and traded drinking water for eating handfuls of fresh powder. My mom said she was glad I had a good trip as I rode with her to my grandparents. When I realized she was in their office, printing emails with the door shut, my grandma insisted we go for a walk and I was led away like a kid. When we went back to the house my mom was still printing. Now I was too old to distract, and I held my questions until my mom and I were alone in the car, heading home. Little needed to be said for my mother to make it clear she had found evidence and I told her to hire a good lawyer on Monday. Geologists predicted the forest would take centuries to come back, but elk hooves broke up the pavement of ash and gophers tunneled under the sheets of sand, turning up the soil. Insects drifted in, then rodents, birds, and now many of the animals that were wiped away are creeping back. I kept reminding myself that despite what was lost in the eruption, life can restore itself.



Sisters, OR: My favorite childhood home  
June 25, 2015  
Canon EOS 60D

**craigslist: Playhouse, Good Condition - \$500 (Sisters, OR 97759)**

Small playhouse, pale blue with cloud-colored trim

Real shingles on roof, front porch with railing

Windows on two sides and a door with a handle/glass pane

Mismatched carpet in red and purple cut from the 1970s

Unfinished interior, but has cupboards on two walls,

And small window ledges on the other sides

Cupboards decorated with colored markers and stickers

Beam running across the ceiling is a head-hazard

Unless you are short enough to walk through

The door without crouching

Good for memories, moving and must go next week



Portland, OR: Airborne Toxic Event Concert with my Father  
October 25, 2014  
iPhone 6

## **Infallible**

“Do you want to know a secret?”  
“I love you.” I forgot you used to say that.  
You’d whisper it, our special code,  
because you couldn’t be direct.  
Our things were running, chess, hunting for snow,  
long drives in the woods, and milkshakes on Sundays.

Do you want to know a secret?  
I knew you were leaving.  
I never told anyone because it was embarrassing.  
Now I see it was yourself you were chasing.  
I used to be proud of you.  
You could run for miles, 100 to be exact.

Do you want to know a secret?  
I often wished you would go away.  
Your moods fickle than the wind grew tiring,  
your impatience and dissatisfaction bolder.  
I wanted you to be more devoted  
to my mother, my sister, the family.

Do you want to know a secret?  
I know your second self and his lies.  
But I can’t face him any more than you.  
My identity took shape without you.  
You were busy with other women.  
You missed me becoming a woman.

Do you want to know a secret?  
The wall between you and me is permanent.  
I feel peace, stability—all you lack.  
Once upon a time, there lived a father.  
This story is about us, how you bit by bit,  
Took us from start to shit.



Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University, Rishi and me on a walk  
March 8, 2015  
iPhone 6



Salem OR: Oregon State Capital

March 28, 2015

iPhone 6



Salem, OR: South Salem High School, IB Chemistry  
May 2014  
iPhone 4s

## **Science & Faith**

You cannot measure it,

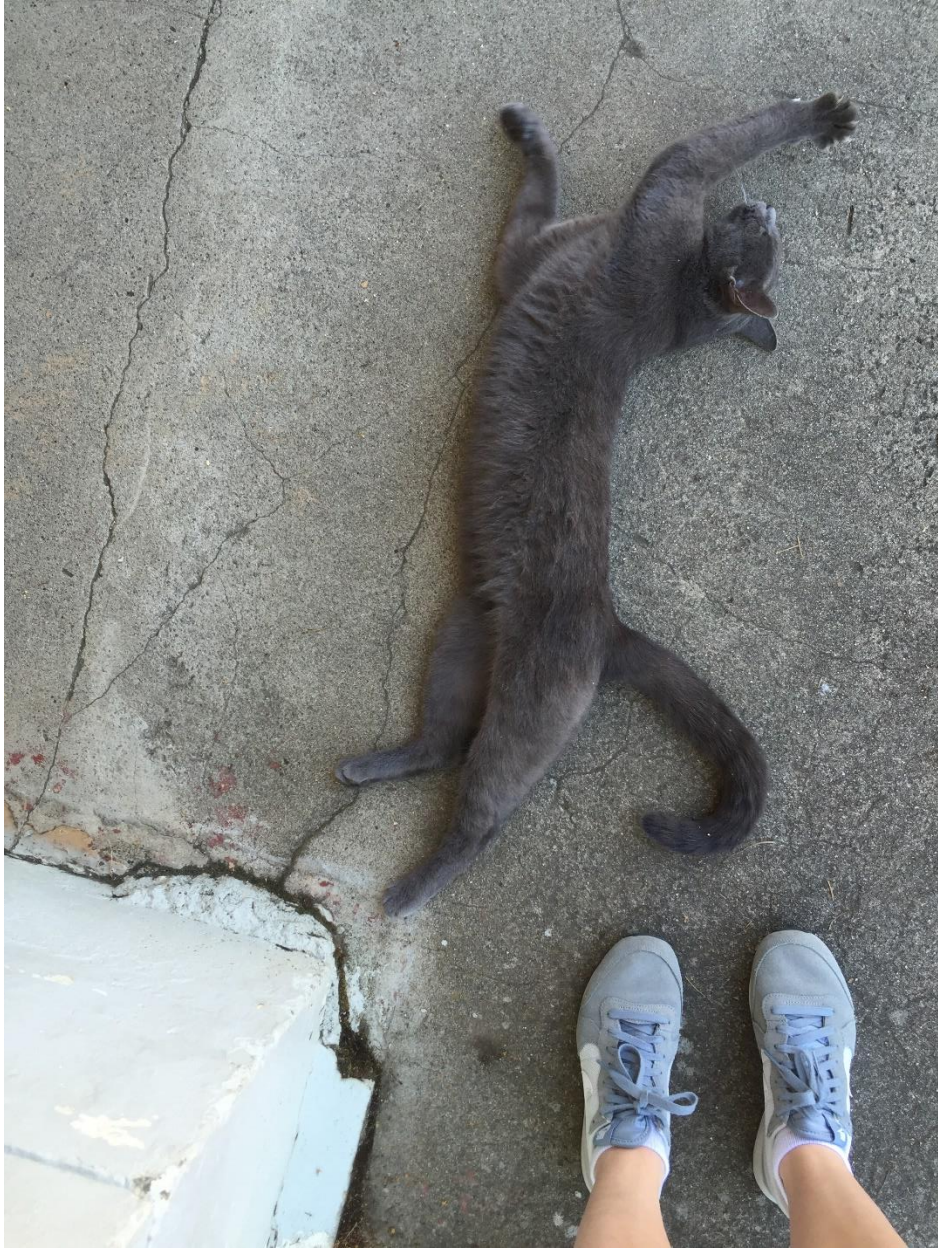
quantify it,

understand it,

calculate it,

or reason with it,

but it will always carry you.



Myrtle Creek, OR: Myrtle Creek Elementary School  
July 15, 2016  
Canon EOS 60D

## **Middle School Mischief: My Catalog as a Camp Counselor**

A cat wandered into the classroom and wouldn't leave  
Everyone got up and had to see.

A professor mentioned someone named Kevin,  
Everyone chimed in to mention a Kevin they knew.

“Screaming is soothing,” yelled one.  
They held screaming contests in the classroom, outside, on the bus.

Don't touch the art.  
A common rule, but somehow unknown to more than a few.

A boy threw a rock at a bird  
Because that's how you catch Pokémon.

Then he poured water on his head and shook it dry like a dog  
In the library.

Plastic water bottles were turned into toys.  
Throwing, crushing, smacking, crashing, until the water bottles had to be taken away.

During solar cars someone started playing music  
They worked and had a sing along, which soon became a scream along.

All this noise is disrupting the neighbors.  
Let's play the quiet game.



Salem, OR: Monty (Airedale) under the Thanksgiving table  
November 22, 2012  
Canon EOS 60D

### **Monty is a Good Boy**

When I brought you for show and  
tell in 4<sup>th</sup> grade my classmates said  
I should have called you bigfoot  
because you hadn't grown into your  
paws. I gave you baths each week  
so you'd learn to like water, unlike  
my other dogs. You never liked them.  
But after you'd let me hold you, so I  
didn't mind. When my dad left you  
were my comforter. I later learned my  
dad would leave each time I got a puppy.  
And when I couldn't sleep through the night  
years later, you ensured I eventually fell  
asleep. You spent more nights of your life  
sleeping by my side and now I'll spend  
more nights of my life missing you.



Corvallis, OR: Oregon State University, Johnson Hall  
October 20, 2016  
iPhone 6

**Location: Professional School**

Becoming an engineer is blurry. I'm writing on yellow paper with faint green lines in pencil to redo homework because I'm wrong on the first, usually second, and often third try. The back of the book is running out of answers. The definitive yes or no or 42 is slipping to best guess, approximation, am I making the correct assumptions. If I was lucky homework took 2-3 hours, but sometimes it took 10 and sometimes I had a midterm to prepare for the next day and sometimes I had 3 in 18 hours. I got sick five times my first year. I showed up at 8:15 for a 7:30 am thermo final. Pro school is learning how much of the world is touched by engineers: everything; look around the room and give me one thing that engineering hasn't permeated. Forget multiple choice or rehearsed problem solving, calculate how fast a cup of coffee cools or when the rain will evaporate from the roads. Understand how a syringe is designed to evenly dose medication so a patient feels no pain. Processes and products need to work because a pregnancy test should be consistent so when a woman is facing one of the most important moments of her life she can have certainty. I went from working alone to tenderly treating homework assignments as a group project. I've seen my world converted from magic to models of natural phenomena.



Willamette River, OR: Rafting trip from Eugene to Corvallis  
June 2, 2017  
Samsung Galaxy S7

### **To: The Overlooked River**

Winding down and around into the valley  
of promise, you've given  
yourself to the soil for our crops.  
Your boundaries have been straightened and  
channelized and eroded as we've stripped  
your edges to pull you closer to our fields,  
then pushed you away when you renew  
with floods. We've dammed you to  
paper and mills and metals,  
placed superfunds in your harbors.  
We've filled you with lumber,  
then pulled it out so fish can make passage,  
then put it back again because  
fish need logs for habitat.  
Until Tom McCall worked to save you.  
Your murky waters are hepatitis free.  
The salmon have come back.  
Your banks house bald eagles, hawks, beavers,  
and otters whose bodies splash  
when they slip from the shore.  
We've remembered your purpose, you are  
the reason for the Trail, the reason humans  
have called you home for thousands of years,  
the reason our urban maps lay the way they do.  
You are the reason for Oregon,  
our water,  
our wealth,  
our Willamette.



Willamette National Forest, OR: Scott Mountain off Hwy 242  
July 29, 2017  
Canon EOS 60D

## **Drive**

From Sisters to Bend, its own unit of time. Take Hwy 20 to the edge of town. Ponderosas break into meadow. Drive past the two white houses; my great uncle used to live in the second. Iron horses gallop across pastures to the backdrop of the Three Sisters and Broken Top. Reenter the forest, rodeo on the right and take a sharp turn around to another clearing. Rural neighborhood on the left, Broken Top Vet on the right, where my first Airedale rests. Ponderosas fade to junipers: tall and elegant to short and coarse. Go past the irrigated desert, ranches marked by green. A new clearing, viewpoints on each side, the right gives the grandest view of the Three Sisters. This clearing is a natural grassland and gives a glimpse of the Cascades the first people saw. Further into arid land, down into a canyon. Like tumbleweed, Tumalo is a footnote, except for the park with its company picnics. Up the other side of the canyon and see the ponderosas come back after all, this was once a logging town.



Bend, OR: Lonza Bend, featuring the glow from the Milli Fire  
August 17, 2017  
Samsung Galaxy S7

## **Ghost Town**

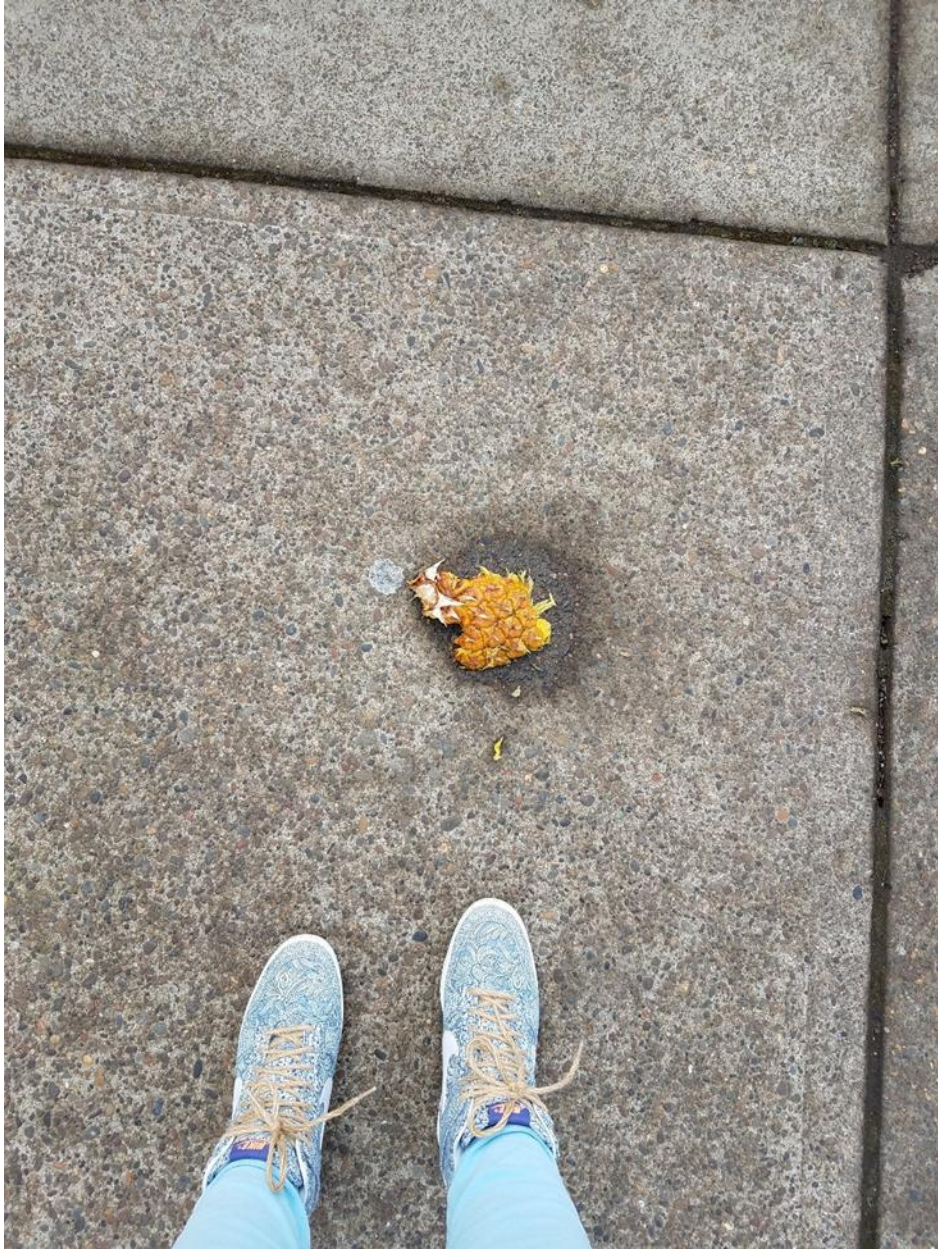
From the conference room I see the butte you ran away to, a grown man taking a break from life, I drive past where you and mom worked every day and each excursion introduces another lost memory from when I sat in the backseat and my feet dangled: the purple neighborhood signs, statues in roundabouts, bikes on every car—all hold déjà vu, I remember a younger girl, I will always be her and never be her but, but here it is hard to know which, our family of four was once we, now “we” are four I’s—here it’s hard to forget that when two little girls keep turning up from the past.



Salem, OR: Rishi and me at Bush Park  
Canon EOS 60D  
January 25, 2013



Mary's Peak, OR: Rishi and me watching the sunset  
April 21, 2017  
Samsung Galaxy S7



Corvallis, OR: The block between Rishi's apartment and mine  
March 4, 2018  
Samsung Galaxy S7

## **Days of Seshadri**

On a Tuesday we went to see *Lincoln* at 11 am, and I felt the gap in our ages fuse closed. Later that day we started dating on a walk next to the Willamette.

On Wednesday we sat next to each other in IB bio and were lab partners.

On Thursday we would meet in our dorm if we didn't have homework.

On Friday nights we almost always spent the evening together, we were each other's favorite part of the week.

On Saturday we wished we could see each other, but often couldn't because I want to be an engineer and he a doctor.

On Sunday we talked on the phone for too long and had trouble running out of things to say.

On Monday we met for our aviation class where we coauthored a chapter on government policy and regulation.

We were significant others, study pals, confidants, high school sweethearts, and best friends.

On a Tuesday during dead week 1897 days later I heard him lying again. I am still the only person he can't trick.

On Wednesday afternoon he called to say we were fine. I waited for him that night and he told me that he decided he didn't love me anymore (after I made him dinner).

Love is not a switch. Day 1898 was the last.

On Thursday I fought tears as I presented to my lab.

On Friday I got sick as I remembered all the times I was taken for granted.

On Saturday I still couldn't eat or sleep, but I realized that my word is iron and his is clay.

On Sunday I mourned our dreams of marriage, kids, and careers.

On Monday I realized he was becoming Dorian Gray and I was still just me.

On Tuesday I was glad my cold hid the tears in my voice. He can lock us in a box and throw away the key, but I know I can't hide him anymore than he can me.

On Wednesday he told me he was seeing someone who had previously encroached on our relationship. But what is 5 years together compared to 7 days single. I know from experience that loyalty is not a technicality because a breakup is not instantaneous.

On Thursday I accepted that I gain more when I lose more, and that love is a commitment, not a conditional feeling. I only wish 5 years, 2 months, and 14 days hadn't passed before I understood.



Three Sisters Wilderness, OR: South Sister Summit  
August 19, 2017  
Samsung Galaxy S7

## Climb

I glared up at the red peak in front of me and I asked myself why.  
Red rivers of decaying cinder flowed down the mountain from hikers before.  
Was it pride? To prove myself? Continuity?  
The narrow ridge breaking off to glaciers on each side held an eroded trail,  
A reminder that above the clouds search and rescue is hours away.  
Silence, but for the crunch beneath my feet.  
For each step forward, the loose ground ripped me back a half.  
I recall the South Sister Sisyphus from 10 years ago, but pain erased the rest.

On a perpetual stairmaster, I counted my steps in intervals of 30.  
Two sets meant I could stop to feign catching my breath.  
Gone was the anticipation and vigor of morning mountain air.  
Thick grey smoke had moved in. I measured my progress looking back, not forward.  
Ten years later I thought this would be easier, now I'm met with laughter.  
I was older, stronger, fiercer, or so I thought.  
I pictured myself at the summit like picturing myself Emperor of the World: dubious.  
Dizzy, drained, displeased I couldn't turn around or the beast would win.

Volcanic grit coated my teeth, leading me to spit  
At the red cinder to spite the mountain.  
I sent my friends ahead, I needed to finish alone.  
Knots knitted my calves and tight pain seared my thighs despite miles of preparation.  
My one desire was to be six miles below, lying in a soft bed,  
Pan dulce and chocolate milk in hand.  
Instead I chose to drag myself above where most planes fly,  
To cry sweat, bash my feet, and eat sand.

I accepted why I had few memories of the first ascent.  
My body had worked to forget them.  
A stream of profanity flowed softly from my mouth at the river of blood cinder.  
Two guys in their 60s passed me, who cares, they had the magic sticks: poles.  
Just me and my red hydroflask against the world.  
At least the 8-year-old hadn't caught me.  
He complained he was tired and his mother snapped back,  
"Honey, everyone on this mountain is tired." I'm still smiling remembering.

The cries of victors who reached the summit taunt me.  
I'm close enough to move forward without stopping, I think.  
My final push to the top is met with a brief view of Mount Bachelor.  
Then white clouds mixed with putrid wildfire smoke  
Took away the view that costs 5,000 feet, a pair of shoes, and a set of toenails.  
Never again, my mantra for the climb.  
But I know the itch will return,  
I can already feel it returning. I will keep going back.



Powell Butte, OR: Photographing the lilac light on the Cascades  
June 25, 2017  
Samsung Galaxy S7

## **Second Chance (Coming Home II)**

My paradise is a basalt plateau that backs up to the Cascades. The borders are lined with High Desert and thirsty junipers and sage brush flatlands cut by glacial rivers and underground springs. At my place destructive fire and violent volcanoes coexist with quiet peace as the pines swish with the wind and carry cinnamon and vanilla from their bark. The land has layers and textures with differing vegetation at each stage. The mornings are cold with the nightly air blown down from the mountains. Locals pray for snow each fall, but the mountains hold back the moist clouds until late October. Snow flurries gather outside and refresh the air and keep the land awake, as open moon and stars glint on the powder. In my town there's a farm where the sprinklers seem to run all year. In the summer the lawn is green. In winter, on the drive to town, there are icicles dripping down the fence of this farm that's been for horses, llamas and now elk. Once environmentalists cut the fence and I was late for school because there was a herd of elk on the highway. Every evening the sun holds my breath as I watch it sink over the Three Sisters, basking gold, pink and lilac light on the encroaching forest and tendrils of lava. Though it's clear who can erase whom, the trees always come back. I still feel the way my heart broke the first time I left. It's broken much harder since then, but losing this prepared me for worse, losing friends, family, and love. The peace I feel coming back assuages all that.